INSERT TITLE HERE: Effects of Titles on the Emotional Perception of a Musical Work

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INSERT TITLE HERE:
Effects of Titles on the Emotional Perception of a Musical Work
Carle Jordan Wirshba, Christopher Bartlette, Ph.D., Vladimir Miskovic, Ph.D.

Purpose

• To explore the impact of visual titles on the emotional perception within a piece of chamber music.
• Will the visual stimuli of text alter, enhance, or change the aural stimuli of the music in terms of an individual’s emotional response?

Procedure

• An original multi-movement work for string quartet and piano, composed by Carle Jordan Wirshba, was used to explore these questions.
• The work, titled Outside In, comprised six movements, in which each movement was specifically composed to attempt to elicit a specific emotion.
• The intended emotions for each movement were:
  1) Joy
  2) Anger
  3) Sadness
  4) Fear
  5) Sadness
  6) Disgust
• By splitting up participants and presenting them with varying visual titles, it could be assessed how (if at all) the visual stimuli affected the emotional response to the aural stimuli.

Participants

• Participants were randomly assigned to one of three cohorts: an agreeing cohort, a disagreeing cohort, and a neutral cohort.
• The agreeing cohort was presented with titles that aligned with the above intended emotions, the disagreeing cohort received contrasting titles, and the neutral cohort received a randomly generated word for the title of the movement.

Measures

• Differential Emotion Scale–IV (DES-IV) (Izard, Libero, Putnam, & Haynes, 1993) – Wirshba and Bartlette Adaptation
• The Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM) (Bradley & Land, 1994) – Only Pleasure and Arousal Variables (Excluded Dominance)

Results Across Movement

• Although not significant, there is a trend that suggests visual titles affect the emotional impact of the music. We anticipate this trend to continue with further research.
• Visual titles have a significant effect on one’s perspective of pleasure, but not on their stimulation.
• For joy, sadness, and fear, the musical stimuli provoked similar responses regardless of the visual title. For anger and disgust, there was a broad range of emotional response. This suggests further consideration of the stimuli, which may be altered or replaced in further research.

Discussion

• Within specific movements, differences in valence and arousal were significant. In movement 1 (joy), arousal increased with an agreeing title but further increased with negative title (p<.01). In this case, a disagreeing title enhanced the perceived emotional experience.
• In movement 5 (sorrow), the neutral and disagreeing titles resulted in significantly more positive valence (p=.015 and .011, respectively). When the musical stimuli retains some ambiguity, the visual title has a greater impact in swaying an individual’s emotional perspective.